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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2685
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RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA PRIORITY 0966
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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 002481

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, IO/UNP, EAP

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - (ADDED CAPTION)

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TAGS: MO PGOV PREL

SUBJECT: THE KING IN JAPAN: MOROCCO CROSSES THE ASIAN FRONTIER

Classified By: Poloff Marcel Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. Summary: King Mohammed VI traveled to Japan from November 27-30, his first trip to Japan since assuming the throne in 1999. During the visit, the King emphasized the warm relations between the two countries, called on business communities to boost investment, and highlighted Japan's active involvement in Moroccan development projects. Although largely appearing like a "friendship visit," the King managed to gain a 10 billion yen (approximately USD 83 million) pledge for development loans and grants from Japan. Summarizing the King's visit to Japan, Deputy FM Fassi Fihri told the Ambassador December 1 that Morocco wanted to give the relationship between the two countries a stronger bilateral flavor. King Mohammed signaled Moroccan support for a Japanese seat on the UN Security Council. Japan's Ambassador to Morocco noted that the visit was an important opportunity for dialogue and allowed Japan to reaffirm its resolve to support Moroccan development efforts. End Summary.

Push for Increased Bilateral Relations

¶2. (U) At the invitation of Emperor Akihito, King Mohammed VI paid an official visit to Japan November 27-30 (NB: This marked the first visit to Japan by a Moroccan monarch. Princess Lalla Salma, however, visited Japan in July to inaugurate Morocco's exhibition at the 2005 World Expo). At an official dinner hosted November 28 by the Emperor and Empress, King Mohammed, recalling his first visit to Japan as Prince in 1987, expressed his deep gratitude for the warm relations Japan and Morocco enjoy politically, economically, and culturally. The King called on Moroccan and Japanese business communities to promote and boost investment in order to "match the dynamism of the public sector." The King also commended the Japanese government's active support of development projects in Morocco.

¶3. (U) The King was accompanied by a delegation of Moroccan senior officials, including Foreign Minister Benissa, royal advisors Abdelaziz Meziane Belfkhi and Mohamed Moatassim, Interior Minister Delegate Fouad Ali Al Himma, as well as the Ministers of Finance, Agriculture, Equipment and Transport, and Industry and Trade.

Japan Pledges More Development Assistance

¶4. (U) During his November 29 meeting with Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who expressed his government's strong support for the King's National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), King Mohammed won pledges from the Japanese government for 10 billion yen (approximately USD 83 million) in development loans and grants. According to press reports, the official development assistance includes 9.46 billion yen (approximately USD 79 million) in loans earmarked for sewage and rural power projects, as well as a 500 million yen (USD 4 million) grant for unspecified purposes. Japan also plans to commit up to 46.1 million yen (USD 385,000) for sound, lighting and audiovisual equipment for Morocco's National Library.

¶5. (U) Morocco and Japan inked agreements on political consultation and the promotion of cultural exchange. The two sides also expressed their satisfaction with the decision, effective January 1, 2006, to waive visa requirements for Moroccan and Japanese citizens holding diplomatic or official passports on a reciprocal basis.

¶6. (U) In addition to meeting with the Emperor and Prime Minister, King Mohammed paid a courtesy visit to Crown Prince Naruhito and the Japanese parliament where he met with the speakers of the House of Representatives and House of Advisors.

Eye Towards African Development

¶7. (U) On the multilateral front, the King highlighted on several occasions throughout his trip Morocco's eagerness to establish, "within the framework of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development," a trilateral

Moroccan-Japanese-African cooperation mechanism to advance living conditions in Africa, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. (Comment: Morocco, with Japan's support, hopes this mechanism will aid in the promotion of South-South Cooperation in Africa. End Comment.)

Views from the MFA

¶8. (C) Deputy FM Taieb Fassi Fihri told the Ambassador December 1 that a key objective for the GOM was to diversify political and economic cooperation beyond traditional allies such as the US and Europe. The King's visit had been postponed on two other occasions; Japan had proposed the visit take place prior to the anniversary meeting of the Barcelona Process in November, but that was not possible. He noted that Japan was Morocco's second largest benefactor in terms of development assistance and provided support "without the complexity of the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA)." Morocco, in turn, supported Japan's quest for a seat on the Security Council; that was hinted at, Fassi Fihri said, in the King's reference in public remarks to "helping Japan play its international role." Japan's neighbors, of course, were less enthusiastic about a UN seat for Japan, Fassi Fihri commented; indeed, Morocco did not favor a seat for India without Pakistan or for South Africa without Morocco to represent Africa. Summarizing the visit, Fassi Fihri said Morocco wanted to give the relationship between the two countries a stronger bilateral flavor.

Additional Japanese Development Aid

¶9. (U) On December 9, the Japanese Embassy in Rabat announced the Japanese government granted approximately USD 713,000 in public aid to twelve Moroccan associations

operating in the fields of water supply, road infrastructure, education, social welfare, and agriculture. (NB: This aid is apparently not tied to the grants won by the King during his visit.) Recalling King Mohammed's visit to Japan, the Japanese Ambassador to Rabat, Seigi Hinata, noted that the visit was an important opportunity for dialogue that allowed the Japanese government to reaffirm its resolve to support Moroccan efforts for social, economic, and cultural development.

Comment

¶10. (C) King Mohammed's visit to Japan helps propel Morocco across the Asian frontier and cements ties between two royal families. Japan is an important benefactor for Morocco, and Japanese assistance helps diversify Morocco's strongest financial backers, which are the Gulf countries. With its focus on aid, the Japan visit also is also somewhat of a departure from other travel the King has undertaken in the last year -- South America and a number of African countries -- where the Western Sahara issue has been at the top of the agenda.
Riley